

To: Senator LeBeau
Representative Berger
Members of the Commerce Committee

Date: March 14, 2012

Re: Support for Raised House Bill No. 5466: **AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE BUSINESSES**

I am writing in support of Raised House Bill No. 5466. I support this bill because I believe that the state of Connecticut should do its utmost to engender a business culture that promotes what I would describe as "capitalism with a soul." People around the world admire the United States for our "can do" attitude and the freedoms we enjoy that enable us to invent and innovate. It is critically important to the health of our country's economy — and its spirit — that all of its citizens maintain the opportunity to pursue the American dream, not only to benefit themselves - but to make a positive impact on society as a whole. Connecticut's citizens want to do *well* - AND they want to do *good*. That is the "double bottom line" of the social enterprise, and Connecticut companies can and should be the leaders in exemplifying this business model to the world.

I am founder and president of a Hartford internet startup called Artbox.com Collaborative. We are building a system of integrated, cloud-based tools and services to enable a collaborative community of creative professionals. When fully realized, our system will provide the premiere work platform for independent creatives such as writers, designers, producers, photographers, artists, illustrators, animators and software developers. In a competitive global economy, these creators of original content, products and services ARE the creators of real economic value. Yet new technology, upheaval in the economy, and competition from cheap overseas labor have resulted in less full-time jobs for creatives. For creatives, and many other industries in which full-time positions have been eliminated, free agency is the future of work, Artbox.com will be the "place" that independents come to do business. Ultimately, our business will create jobs locally - and it will also provide for "jobs" — however nontraditional — on a larger national scale.

The National Science Foundation has awarded Artbox LLC Phase I, Phase II and several supplemental grants through its Small Business Innovation Award program. We have been able to hire 3.5 full time employees and are currently seeking funding to grow expand our operations here in Hartford.

The status designation of "Social Enterprise" is important to our company because we know that artists - our customer base - are also activists. Artbox.com's system supports artists and arts groups in their efforts to use their talents to make money AND to make meaning by responding to the needs of charities, non-profits, and other causes. We call this initiative 'The Creative Force'. If Artbox.com Collaborative can promote itself to be an official social enterprise in Connecticut, we will demonstrate our credibility as a company that is serious about solving society's problems — and therefore attract the kind of like-minded employees, customers and investment partners for whom this is a value-added business model.

With passage of this legislation, Connecticut will take great strides towards proving itself to be a place that upholds the culture of ingenuity, work ethic and striving for the common good.

Thank you for your consideration and do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Messina
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